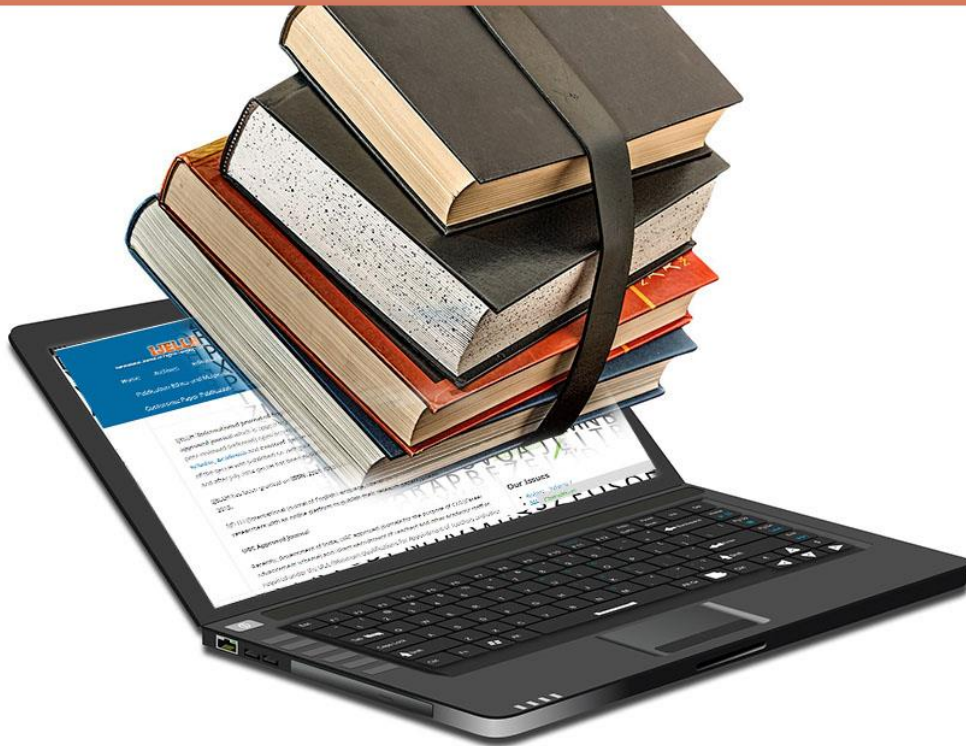


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Chak De! India: Ideological Interpellation of the 'Other' Identity

Abstract

Movies by presenting human life in all its shades and forms in a relatable manner become an integral part of our life. The influence of movies is thus ubiquitous as they become part of our conscious, subconscious and more importantly our identities because of the shared experiences and emotions projected in the movies. They, therefore, work as apparatuses or vehicles of certain beliefs, values, and ideologies which are prominent in certain culture thereby reinforcing these ideologies by making us accustomed to them. The present study explores the role of movies as ideological apparatuses with specific reference to the movie *Chak De! India* wherein is presented the frequently marginalized and considered as the 'other' identity- the woman identity. Further, the study aimed at analyzing how this identity is often stereotyped and subdued and how the movie thus subverts these stereotypes by giving them voice and agency and thus, brings the woman identity to the forefront by making them part of the dominant narrative.

Keywords: Interpellation, Ideological State Apparatus, Man/Woman, Patriarchal society, Self/Other.

Indian society is a male-dominated patriarchal society wherein the power and agency solely lie in the hands of the male population of the society. In such patriarchal societies, all the social institutions and cultural artifacts are controlled, organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains such as familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. The female is usually defined as a negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an "Other", her lack of the identifying male power or character traits that are presumed to have the ability and strength to establish culture and civilization. Women, on the other hand, are taught in the process of their being socialized to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology, that is, the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination. The woman identity is thus marginalized by the male dominant narrative and is labeled as that 'other' part of the state which is shaped by institutionalizing the patriarchal values and beliefs through the use of apparatuses. One such prevalent apparatus through which they interpellate their dominance is Media. Media in the form of films, advertisements, etc mirrors the society in the form of the portrayal of ethos, prevalent ideologies, power structures, and social hierarchies. Movies through the narratives and characters thus construct a social reality wherein certain form of identities are naturalized and interpellated into the common viewpoint of the audience. Movies being an integral part of the Indian society thus reflect the dominance of the male narrative in the mainstream discourse.

Marxist criticism suggests that "cultural artifacts represent the world around in certain ways so that we obtain particular meanings from them". (Nayar 129) Therefore, cultural artifacts perform a social function by naturalizing a dominant ideology, values, belief systems wherein various mediums like movies represent certain beliefs in a certain manner in order to influence the audience. Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher in his essay *Ideology*

and *Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)* argued that ideology is propagated through particular structures in society. These he termed as 'Repressive State Apparatuses' and 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. 'Repressive State Apparatuses' consist of "institutions like the law, the police, and army through which the state imposes an ideology through the threat of sanctioned violence." (Nayar 134) 'Ideological State Apparatuses' on the other hand are those "that include institutions and structures such as the family, religion, the media, the education system convince people of the 'correctness' of ideology by presenting it as a desirable object or idea." (Nayar 134) Althusser further presented the concept of interpellation which is "the process of consenting to ideology, accepting it and not being aware of it." (Nayar 135) Giorgio Agamben in his essay *What is an Apparatus?* further defined apparatus as "anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, opinions, or discourses of living beings" (Agamben 14). The ideologies of the state are reiterated through such apparatuses in order to normalize them into the consciousness of the members of the society. Movies thus function as apparatuses which by reflecting the slice of life propagate certain ideologies, values, etc. thereby shaping our perceptions of reality.

The present paper aims at analyzing the workings of movies as apparatuses and how they interpellate certain ideologies by analyzing the movie *Chak De! India*. *Chak De! India* released in 2007 is an Indian sports film, directed by Shimit Amin and Rob Miller (sports scenes), and produced by Aditya Chopra, with music by Salim–Sulaiman and a screenplay by Jaideep Sahni. The movie is a fictionalized narration of the Indian women's national hockey win at the 2002 Commonwealth Games and deals with women empowerment, different marginalized identities and the stereotypes and prejudices attached to these identities. The cast of the film includes Shahrukh Khan as Kabir Khan, former captain of the Indian men's national hockey team who after a cataclysmic loss to Pakistan is shunned by the society and deemed a traitor to the nation. In order to redeem himself, he

returns seven years later as the coach of the national women's hockey team with the goal to unify the team and win the World Championship.

Through the close reading of the movie, the present paper aims at analyzing the woman identity as represented in the movie. In the present social and political Indian context wherein, the prevalent feminist discourse is trying to counter the dominant patriarchal notions and the constricting gender roles of the patriarchal society, the movie *Chak De! India* serves as a vehicle to the ideological reconstruction of the marginalized woman identity subjugated by the current dominant ideologies. The present paper aims at looking how the patriarchal society silences the narrative of the marginalized women and how the movie through the field of sports break this silence and helps the female characters in establishing their self-defined identity.

The representation of the woman identity in the film narratives has always been a point of debate. In India, the male dominance over the mainstream discourse has lead to either underrepresentation or misrepresentation of the narrative of the women. Being in power the patriarchal male controls the film narrative from the point of its production to the point of its consumption. The movies thus represent a social reality from the male viewpoint which influences who is represented in what manner and what are the ideologies propagated. In accordance with patriarchal belief systems, the women narrative is silenced and a value based moral woman identity is superimposed in order to normalize such identity as the dominant identity. They shape the woman identity in accordance with their ideologies by presenting through movies how they should look, behave, dress, etc in various spaces in which they move through the portrayal of women characters. Film scholar and author Shoma Chatterji in her book *Subject: Cinema, Object: Women* states:

Women in Hindi cinema have been decorative objects with rarely any sense of agency being imparted to them. Each phase of Hindi cinema had its own representation of women, but they were confined largely to the traditional, patriarchal framework of the Indian society. The ordinary woman has hardly been visible in Hindi cinema. (Chatterji 43)

From the family drama to the war based movies, the representation of the female character is always defined in context to the male character like the hero, villain, the father, etc whose narrative is central to the script. They are secondary to the film narrative and are just objects required for the delineation of the male character. Through the genre of family drama like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, *Hum aapke Hai Kaun*, etc the domestic sphere is rendered as the preferred space where the ideal women reside. In accordance to the patriarchal values, a docile, domesticated and noble women identity who nurtures her family and considers her duty to uphold through example the traditional Indian values and beliefs and preserve the honor of her family is thus constructed and the stereotypical gender roles are normalized. In order to reinforce the identity of the ideal woman, a dichotomy is created by the portrayal of the other women who do not conform to the norms of the society and is westernized which is shown through her dress, smoking and alcohol consumption. Through the portrayal of the morally degraded and westernized women, the ideal women identity is justified as she preserves the Indian culture and this association is conditioned into the minds of the audience through the reiteration of similar characters in various movies.

A woman's role is limited in the film narrative to provide glamour, relief, and entertainment. The prevalent portrayal of a damsel in distress narrative delineates the woman as the weaker sex who lacks the mental capacity to take care of herself and always needs a man to ensure her safety. An independent existence is thus denied to the female character

whose life gain meaning only because of the male presence. Even in the war movies, a woman is always represented as the beloved who waits for the return of her lover who is fighting a war while she leads a meaningless life because of his absence. Thus by denying agency to the female characters, they dominate their narrative by representing them and influencing their identity in accordance with their patriarchal belief systems.

However, the modern contemporary film narratives transformed with the advent of the feminist discourse as an ideology which was inaugurated late in the 1960s and which espoused the cause of women who have been oppressed and marginalized since time immemorial. The Feminist criticism developed against the belief of biological determinism of human gender roles which considered women as naturally weaker than men because of their gender. They distinguished between sex which is biologically determined and gender which is a social construction. They problematized how cultural texts such as cinema, music, painting, and literature parallel the stereotypical gender beliefs of society and reinforce them through representation. They instill the values in the readers that women are weak and only concerned about materialistic things like jewelry, clothing, and matters pertaining to romantic and domestic activities and that they need to be guided by men in the social life leading to their subordination.

The feminist critics problematize the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in the narratives of mainstream cinema. They adopt a critical approach towards gender bias on celluloid by asking few pertinent questions regarding how women are represented on screen, how women's issues are treated in cinema, what does feminism mean to film-makers, how does the feminist agenda manifest on screen, how is the women character positioned vis-à-vis the male character and what is the role of women film-makers and women writers in depicting women's issues through cinema. Thus the modern

contemporary film narratives as a result of the dominant feminist discourse are trying to break away from the stereotypical representation of female characters through movies like *Pink*, *Queen*, etc but still they are not able to subvert the major threat to the representation of woman in movies like; the still prevalent objectification of women and the over sexualized women characters.

The movie *Chak De! India* being a sports drama film subverts the binary constructed in our society of man/woman by the portrayal of sixteen different female characters belonging to varied regions, class, caste, etc. The film narrative captures their struggle as the fight against the different stereotypes and prejudices which they have to face as being part of the marginalized gender in the Indian patriarchal society.

The movie is not a clichéd Bollywood movie portraying the narrative of a damsel in distress that needs to be saved by a man or that of a silent passive female character. In contrast, the movie is the narrative of sixteen hockey players thereby reflecting the obstacles they face in order to create a space in the male-dominated field of sports. In order to contest their dominance over this field, they have to fight against the stereotypical gender roles constructed by the patriarchal society which are reiterated through dialogues like "woman's place is in the kitchen" and "And I do not get why you take women's hockey so seriously. Indian women are born to cook and clean. They cannot run around in short skirts." (*Chak De! India* 00:11:15-00:11:27). These dialogues are uttered by the hockey officials who ironically are supposed to encourage the girls and fight for them but in contrast, feel that Indian women's hockey team has never done anything and nor will do anything. Even the woman official partakes in the ridiculing of the women's team by other male officials thereby reflecting how deeply integrated are the patriarchal values that women are supposed to be constricted to the domestic space and have no role to play in the sports field. Even she has

been given a position in the association only as a token representative of women just to portray that women are allowed to occupy power positions irrespective of the fact that the association head is a male who shapes the destiny of the Indian Women's Hockey team based on his patriarchal values.

In the earlier scenes of the movie, the players who are to be part of the Indian hockey team are introduced and they belong to different states and strata of society. Belonging to different regions, they have different temperaments and personality and carry with them regional loyalties and prejudices. On one hand, there is Komal Chautala played by Chitrashi Rawat who is from a remote village in Haryana and who made her place in the team by fighting against the rigid patriarchal norms governing the rural societies. Her father rather than being happy that she got selected in the national team is more concerned about who will marry her as she has none of the qualities prescribed to a traditional Indian girl but rather she acts like a boy. On the other hand, there is Preeti Sabarwal played by Sagarika Ghatge who is one of the famous players from Chandigarh and is engaged to Abhimanyu Singh who is the vice-captain of the Indian national cricket team. Through her character, the movie portrays that women from the urban society also face discrimination and their life is still controlled by the men around them as is reflected when her fiancé does not take her passion towards the games seriously and instead asks her to leave the team and marry him. In a scene, he informs her that her father has given him permission to go ahead with the marriage without consulting her thus denying her any agency or choice in the matters concerning her life as is the case of most of the women in this society. In the similar scene she questions her fiancé as to why she has to leave the team for the marriage instead he could leave his team since marriage is between two individuals and if one has to compromise for the other then why not he. His replies that his game and position in the team holds more importance as compared to hers reflect the hypocrisy and dominance of the Indian men over the female narrative.

The characters Rani Dispotta played by Seema Azmi and Soimoi Kerketa played by Nisha Nair are from the remote villages in Jharkhand. Belonging to such a remote village they are unable to speak properly and understand English and are thus bullied by the short-tempered Balbir Kaur played by Tanya Abrol who is from Punjab. She deems them as being wild since they cannot understand anything thus through their character the movie portrays the obstacles and discrimination faced because of the linguistic barriers. The character Nethra Reddy from Andhra Pradesh faces regional stereotype when an official associate her to the generalized image of every South Indian being a Madrasi and when she tries to correct him he takes it in a light manner by stating there is no much difference to which she replies that there is as much difference as is there between a Punjabi and a Bihari. Similarly, the characters Mary Ralte played by Kimi Laldwla from Mizoram and Molly Zimik played by Masochon Zimik from Manipur also face regional stereotype and discrimination. Even from being the North- East part of India they are considered to be outsiders to which they reply that “how can one be happy by becoming a guest in their own country?” (*Chak De! India* 00:21:55) and they also face eve-teasing and catcalling just because they are in western attire which is perceived as a method to sexually encourage the innocent male counterparts in our patriarchal society. The captain of the team Vidya Sharma played by Vidya Malvade is a brilliant player but is forced to choose between her game and marriage by her husband Rakesh and her in-laws. Being a married woman, she is supposed to take care of the wishes of her husband and family and bear children and thus remain constricted to the domestic space. The stereotypical gender roles thus coerce her and many such women to prioritize their familial duties over the game they are passionate about and are also excelling in.

The movie by depicting the different struggles faced by the different women characters belonging to different strata of the society reflects the prejudices and discriminations faced by them as a result of their gender which is used in a patriarchal society

to dominate them. Simone De Beauvoir in her most famous work *The Second Sex* presented gender existing in a dichotomy in the society wherein man defined their 'Self' as the ideal against the woman who is then seen as the 'Other' or the deviant and is thus subjugated. She argued that there is no such thing as an ideal woman as it is but a construct defined by men and society: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ...which is described as feminine". (Beauvoir 267) By this cultural process, the masculine traits in our culture have become synonymous with being rational and dominant; the feminine traits, perceived as the binary opposite, have come to be recognized as passive and emotional. The woman characters in the movie are undermined and questioned at every step in their journey towards playing for their country. They have to prove that they have talent and strength to achieve their goal and thus should not be perceived as weak or subservient. They fight against the patriarchal heads of the society such as the father, husband and even the head of the organization to subvert the deep-seated conditioned belief that they are the weaker sex.

In the movie, the girls undergo rigorous training to the point of breaking under the coaching of Kabir Khan from dawn till late in the night and some players are even punished to sit on the bench for the whole duration of the training for several days. He through this severe training wants to channelize their passion for the game and their zeal to prove themselves, in hard work and discipline in order to unify the team which is divided because of regional differences. The scenes of their training reflect how the coach's treatment of them is not influenced by their gender as he treats them as individual units who are part of the collective whole. Through these scenes, the stereotypical identity of a woman being delicate and timid is subverted and an identity of a woman is projected who is not weak but have the vigor enough to give it all for her passion and fight against any obstacle. Through this their ability to contest the dominance of men over the field of sports is also intensified.

The most famous scene from the movie is the McDonald's scene which marks a turning point in the narrative of the film but also in the struggles of the female characters. In the light of his dismissal, the coach invites the team for lunch at McDonald's as his farewell gift. In the eatery, the characters Molly Zimik and Mary Ralte while going back to their seats are eve-teased and ogled at by some young men. The girls ignore them but their continuous lewd comments and catcalling irk the short-tempered Balbir who questions them and while daring them to try harassing the girls again slaps one hard across the face thereby challenging the male ego who in turn pushes her away. This leads to a brawl between them and as more men join the fight, the other players of the team also join them. This ruckus leads to upturned tables and chairs while the girls slap and punch and fight with hockey sticks. The much-divided players work and fight as a team during the whole physical ordeal. This scene captures the widespread experience of eve teasing in public spaces which every Indian woman has faced. The violence in the scene is the physical manifestation of the years of suppression and abuse faced by women. Through this scene, the silenced narrative of the marginalized gender is given a voice and the identity of a woman is constructed who is not someone who would passively submit to abuse but someone who has the agency to speak out and even fight physically against the men as an equal. Though violence is no solution and not a justified vehicle of empowerment but the movie through this scene rather than focusing on the violence focuses more on the strength of a woman as an individual as well as women as collective team who have the courage and power enough to fight against the men in any form and in any space. Their coach and other team officials do not intervene in the fight or try to stop them as this would turn the female characters again into the damsel in distress who needs saving by men and would turn the focus of the narrative on the coach as their savior. By the end of this scene, the sixteen individual players are transformed into a unified team defined

by their spirit to fight against anyone who tries to stop them from achieving their dream to represent their nation in the World Championship.

The movie through these scenes of the rigorous training and the girls fighting as a team problematizes the deep-seated stereotype associated with the female gender being physically weak and lacking the ability and spirit to stand up and fight for themselves. The movie here reiterates Judith Butler's famous theory of Gender Performativity which she theorized in her acclaimed work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* published in 1990. In her book, she argued against gender as a fixed category and presented that gender is continually performed or acted by an individual in accordance with a socio-cultural context. In this book, Butler presented her famous performative theory of gender wherein she explored how a subject's identity is formed while he performs it and proposed that gender cannot be treated as essence, but must be taken as a performative construct. Gender identity, thus, is not a manifestation of intrinsic essence but rather the product of actions and behaviors, that is, performance. It is a series of everyday acts which are inevitable and repetitive like speech, clothing, gestures, and behaviors within specific discourses of law, medicine, religion, and family, sexuality that a body performs, thereby identifying one as a woman or a man. One cannot act or acquire an identity outside this system of discourses. The power wielded by the male counterpart of the society is the result of their control over the knowledge disseminated through various social institutions, cultural artifacts and various modes of representation. The subservience of women is thus a result of them being subjected to these male-dominated discourses which present them with the preconceived biases associated with their gender. Similarly, the movie presents that women being part of a patriarchal society inculcate the gender roles and the stereotypes associated to their gender through the process of socialization and start performing their gender in accordance to the beliefs perpetuated by the patriarchal society thereby reinforcing the stereotypes. However,

the movie presents the women characters in the movie a sports field as an equal non-gendered space where through the physical training, which symbolises their socialization, they are trained to perform their gender in a different manner and thus are given an agency and voice to not only subvert the stereotypical belief of them being the 'other' weaker sex but also as women who have the strength and power to step out of the domestic sphere to start writing their own narrative.

Another crucial scene is when the transformed girls work hard as a unified team to be able to play in the World Championship however another obstacle comes in their way when the Board denies them permission and funds for the championship. They feel that it is more worthwhile to invest in the Men's Hockey team as compared to the Women's hockey team as the boys are able enough to win at least a bronze medal. The girl's prowess in their game is underestimated in the face of the male counterpart. Their coach however sure of the strength of the team wagers a bet with an official to have a match between the men's and women's hockey team and to fund the women's team for the championship if they win. The official of the Board agrees to the bet thinking it an impossible task that women can contest men in the field of sports and win. Everyone thinks that it would be an easy task for the men's team to defeat the women's team however the scene depicts otherwise as the girls fight tooth and nail against the opponent team making them work for the win. Just before the match, their coach inspires them by giving the following speech:

Kabir: Don't think that you are playing this match against sixteen boys. No. You are playing against all those people of this country who think girls can't play as well as the guys; that they can't have good jobs as the boys have; that they can't make good decisions like the boys do. Your match today is with every fool who has forgotten that

if a girl can give birth to the likes of him, then, they can do anything they want. Anything. (*Chak De! India* 1:17:38-1:18:50)

This speech summarises the ideology the movie is trying to instill in its audience by constructing a women identity who has the courage to break away from the male dominance and the patriarchal norms of the society and has the agency to shape her own narrative. The girls, however, lose the game but their passion to win and play stupefies the men's team who honor them by saluting their courage by their hockey sticks.

During the World Championship, the team struggles to fight against teams belonging to developed nations and also get intimidated but their spirit does not waiver in the face of the enemy. They fight with the motto that “we will die and come but we will not loose and come” (*Chak De! India* 1:57:57) which helps them in persevering the Championship up to the finals. Another crucial scene occurs just before the final of the World Championship when the coach of the team gives the most famous monologue from the movie:

Today, whether you play well or not you will remember these 70 minutes for the rest of your life. So I will not tell you how to play today, all I will say is go out there and play these 70 minutes to their fullest. Because after this moment, whatever happens in life whether its good or not, whatever the end result is, whether you win or lose, no one can take these 70 minutes away from you, no one! So I have decided, I will not tell you how to play today, you will tell me, by playing. Because I know that in these 70 minutes if every player in this team plays the best hockey game of her life then even God cannot take these 70 minutes away from you. So go! Go and from yourselves, from this life, from your God, and from every person who didn't have faith in you, go snatch your 70 minutes. (*Chak De! India* 02:05:23-02:07:07)

The scene works at so many metaphorical levels but the most essential is the narrative it adds to the feminist discourse through the message of women empowerment. The ideology the movie instills is simple and just asks the women to go out of their defined domesticated sphere and the stereotypical gender roles and by voicing their narrative contest the male-dominated spaces and occupy those spaces. After winning the World Championship, the journey of the players from individual's struggling to find and establish their identity to members of the Indian National Women's Hockey team who represented and won for their nation completes and the transformation can easily be seen in the characters. They now form a major part of the mainstream narrative and play an equally important part in the discourse of the nation and nation-building narrative. Komal's father realizes his mistake and asks her to beat him or any other father who tries to constrict his daughter by denying her the opportunity to play with the same hockey stick. Vidya's husband and in-laws also realize their mistake and are proud of her achievements. Preeti who fought the tournament to prove to his fiancé that she and her sports both have the capacity to subvert his dominance denies his proposal of marriage publicly thus finally having the agency to take her own life decisions.

Conclusion

The movie *Chak De! India* thus through the journey of a female sportsperson in India shows their struggle against the different power structures. These power structures from the Board officials who do not take the women's team seriously to the family members who constrict them in the socially constructed gender roles, all work towards silencing and 'othering' of the female narrative in accordance to patriarchal ideologies of our society. This movie, however, works as an apparatus to interpellate in its audience the prevalent feminist ideologies. The movie speaks of women empowerment through the field of sports by using

the motifs of space and agency. Through giving voice and agency to strong female characters belonging to different strata of society, the movie shows how any woman irrespective of caste, class, religion, etc by breaking away from the male-defined and controlled identity and attaining the power to construct her own narrative and by defining her own identity can contest the various male-dominated spaces and can occupy them and become part of the mainstream discourse.

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